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ARIA Study Group; MASK Study Group; Bousquet, J. Jean; Schünemann, Holger J.; Togias, Alkis; Erhola, Marina

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REVIEW

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Next-generation ARIA care pathways for rhinitis and asthma: a model for multimorbid chronic diseases

J. Jean Bousquet^{1,2,3,4*} , Holger J. Schünemann⁶, Alkis Togias⁷, Marina Erhola⁸, Peter W. Hellings^{3,9,10}, Torsten Zuberbier^{4,5}, Ioana Agache¹¹, Ignacio J. Ansotegui¹², Josep M. Anto^{13,14,15,16}, Claus Bachert¹⁷, Sven Becker¹⁸, Martin Bedolla-Barajas¹⁹, Michael Bewick²⁰, Sinthia Bosnic-Anticevich^{21,22,23}, Isabelle Bosse²⁴, Louis P. Boulet²⁵, Jean Marc Bourrez²⁶, Guy Brusselle²⁷, Niels Chavannes²⁸, Elisio Costa²⁹, Alvaro A. Cruz^{30,31}, Wienczyslaw Czarlewski³², Wytske J. Fokkens^{3,33}, Joao A. Fonseca^{34,35}, Mina Gaga³⁶, Tari Haahtela³⁷, Maddalena Illario³⁸, Ludger Klimek³⁹, Piotr Kuna⁴⁰, Violeta Kvedariene⁴¹, L. T. T. Le⁴², Desiree Larenas-Linnemann⁴³, Daniel Laune⁴⁴, Olga M. Lourenço⁴⁵, Enrica Menditto⁴⁶, Joaquin Mullol^{47,48}, Yashitaka Okamoto⁴⁹, Nikos Papadopoulos^{50,51}, Nhân Pham-Thi⁵², Robert Picard⁵³, Hilary Pinnock⁵⁴, Nicolas Roche⁵⁵, Regina E. Roller-Wirnsberger⁵⁶, Christine Rolland⁵⁷, Boleslaw Samolinski⁵⁸, Aziz Sheikh⁵⁴, Sanna Toppila-Salmi³⁷, Ioanna Tsiligianni^{59,60}, Arunas Valiulis⁶¹, Erkkä Valovirta⁶², Tuula Vasankari⁶³, Maria-Teresa Ventura⁶⁴, Samantha Walker⁶⁵, Sian Williams⁶², Cezmi A. Akdis⁶⁶, Isabella Annesi-Maesano⁶⁷, Sylvie Arnavielhe⁴⁴, Xavier Basagana^{13,14,15,16}, Eric Bateman⁶⁸, Anna Bedbrook¹, K. S. Bennoor⁶⁹, Samuel Benveniste⁷⁰, Karl C. Bergmann^{4,5}, Slawomir Bialek⁷¹, Nils Billo⁷², Carsten Bindeslev-Jensen^{73,74}, Leif Bjermer⁷⁵, Hubert Blain^{76,77}, Mateo Bonini^{78,79}, Philippe Bonniaud⁸⁰, Jacques Bouchard^{81,82}, Vitalis Briedis⁸³, Christofer E. Brightling^{84,85}, Jan Brozek⁶, Roland Buhl⁸⁶, Roland Buonaiuto⁸⁷, Giorgio W. Canonica⁸⁸, Victoria Cardona⁸⁹, Ana M. Carriazo⁹⁰, Warner Carr⁹¹, Christine Cartier⁹², Thomas Casale⁹³, Lorenzo Cecchi⁹⁴, Alfonso M. Cepeda Sarabia^{95,96}, Eka Chkhartishvili⁹⁷, Derek K. Chu³, Cemal Cingi⁹⁸, Elaine Colgan⁹⁹, Jaime Correia de Sousa^{100,101}, Anne Lise Courbis¹⁰², Adnan Custovic¹⁰³, Biljana Cvetkoski^{21,22,23}, Gennaro D'Amato¹⁰⁴, Jane da Silva¹⁰⁵, Carina Dantas^{106,107}, Dejand Dokic¹⁰⁸, Yves Dauvilliers¹⁰⁹, Antoni Dedeu^{110,111}, Giulia De Feo¹¹², Philippe Devillier¹¹³, Stefania Di Capua¹¹⁴, Marc Dykewicz¹¹⁵, Ruta Dubakienė¹¹⁶, Motohiro Ebisawa¹¹⁷, Yaya El-Gamal¹¹⁸, Esben Eller^{73,74}, Regina Emuzyte¹¹⁹, John Farrell¹⁰¹, Antjie Fink-Wagner¹²⁰, Alessandro Fiocchi¹²¹, Jean F. Fontaine¹²², Bilun Gemicioğlu¹²³, Peter Schmid-Grendelmeier¹²⁴, Amiran Gamkrelidze¹²⁵, Judith Garcia-Aymerich¹³, Maximiliano Gomez¹²⁶, Sandra González Díaz¹²⁷, Maia Gotua¹²⁸, Nick A. Guldmond¹²⁹, Maria-Antonieta Guzmán¹³⁰, Jawad Hajjam¹³¹, John O'B Hourihane¹³², Marc Humbert¹³³, Guido Iaccarino¹³⁴, Despo Ierodiakonou^{59,62}, Maddalena Illario³⁵, Juan C. Ivancevich¹³⁵, Guy Joos²⁵, Ki-Suck Jung¹³⁶, Marek Jutel¹³⁷, Igor Kaidashev¹³⁸, Omer Kalayci¹³⁹, Przemyslaw Kardas¹⁴⁰, Thomas Keil^{141,142}, Mussa Khaitov¹⁴³, Nikolai Khaltayev¹⁴⁴, Jorg Kleine-Tebbe¹⁴⁵, Marek L. Kowalski¹⁴⁶, Vicky Kritikos^{21,22,23}, Inger Kull^{147,148}, Lisa Leonardini¹⁴⁹, Philip Lieberman¹⁵⁰, Brian Lipworth¹⁵¹, Karin C. Lodrup Carlsen^{152,153}, Claudia C. Loureiro¹⁵⁴, Renaud Louis¹⁵⁵, Alpina Mair¹⁵⁶, Gert Marien³, Bassam Mahboub¹⁵⁷, Joao Malva^{107,158}, Patrick Manning¹⁵⁹, Esteban De Manuel Keenoy¹⁶⁰,

*Correspondence: jean.bousquet@orange.fr

¹ MACVIA-France, Fondation Partenariale FMC VIA-LR, CHU, 34295 Montpellier Cedex 5, France

Full list of author information is available at the end of the article



Gailen D. Marshall¹⁶¹, Mohamed R. Masjedi¹⁶², Jorge F. Maspero¹⁶³, Eve Mathieu-Dupas⁴⁴, Poalo M. Matricardi¹⁶⁴, Eric Melén^{148,165}, Elisabete Melo-Gomes¹⁶⁶, Eli O. Meltzer¹⁶⁷, Enrica Menditto⁴⁶, Jacques Mercier¹⁶⁸, Neven Miculinic¹⁶⁹, Florin Mihaltan¹⁷⁰, Branislava Milenkovic¹⁷¹, Giuliana Moda¹⁷², Maria-Dolores Mogica-Martinez¹⁷³, Youssef Mohammad^{174,175}, Steve Montefort¹⁷⁶, Ricardo Monti¹⁷⁷, Mario Morais-Almeida¹⁷⁸, Ralf Mösges^{179,180}, Lars Münter¹⁸¹, Antonella Muraro¹⁸², Ruth Murray^{183,184}, Robert Naclerio¹⁸⁵, Luigi Napoli¹⁸⁶, Leila Namazova-Baranova¹⁸⁷, Hugo Neffen^{188,189}, Kristoff Nekam¹⁹⁰, Angelo Neou¹⁹¹, Enrico Novellino¹⁹², Dieudonné Nyembue¹⁹³, Robin O'Hehir¹⁹⁴, Ken Ohta²⁶¹, Kimi Okubo¹⁹⁵, Gabrielle Onorato¹, Solange Ouedraogo¹⁹⁶, Isabella Pali-Schöll¹⁹⁷, Susanna Palkonen¹⁹⁸, Peter Panzner¹⁹⁹, Hae-Sim Park²⁰⁰, Jean-Louis Pépin^{201,202}, Ana-Maria Pereira^{203,204}, Oliver Pfaar²⁰⁶, Ema Paulino²⁰⁷, Jim Phillips²⁰⁸, Robert Picard⁵³, Davor Plavec^{209,210}, Ted A. Popov²¹¹, Fabienne Portejoie¹, David Price^{212,213}, Emmanuel P. Prokopakis²¹⁴, Benoit Pugin³, Filip Raciborski⁵⁸, Rojin Rajabian-Söderlund²¹⁵, Sietze Reitsma^{3,33}, Xavier Rodo¹³, Antonino Romano^{216,217}, Nelson Rosario²¹⁸, Menahem Rottem²¹⁹, Dermot Ryan²²⁰, Johanna Salimäki²²¹, Mario M. Sanchez-Borges²²², Juan-Carlos Sisul²²³, Dirceu Solé²²⁴, David Somekh²²⁵, Talant Sooronbaev²²⁶, Milan Sova²²⁷, Otto Spranger¹²⁰, Cristina Stellato¹¹², Rafael Stelmach²²⁸, Charlotte Suppli Ulrik²²⁹, Michel Thibaudon²³⁰, Teresa To²³¹, Ana Todo-Bom¹⁵⁴, Peter V. Tomazic²³², Antonio A. Valero²³³, Rudolph Valenta^{234,235,236}, Marilyn Valentin-Rostan²³⁷, Rianne van der Kleij^{238,239}, Olivier Vandenplas²⁴⁰, Giorgio Vezzani²⁴¹, Frédéric Viart⁹², Giovanni Viegi^{242,243}, Dana Wallace²⁴⁴, Martin Wagenmann²⁴⁵, De Y. Wang²⁴⁶, Susan Wasserman²⁴⁷, Magnus Wickman²⁴⁸, Dennis M. Williams²⁴⁹, Gary Wong²⁰⁵, Piotr Wroczyński⁷¹, Panayiotis K. Yiallourous^{250,251}, Arzu Yorgancioglu²⁵², Osman M. Yusuf²⁵³, Heahter J. Zar^{254,255}, Stéphane Zeng²⁵⁶, Mario Zernotti²⁵⁷, Luo Zhang²⁵⁸, Nan S. Zhong²⁵⁹, Mihaela Zidarn²⁶⁰, the ARIA Study Group and the MASK Study Group

Abstract

Background: In all societies, the burden and cost of allergic and chronic respiratory diseases are increasing rapidly. Most economies are struggling to deliver modern health care effectively. There is a need to support the transformation of the health care system into integrated care with organizational health literacy.

Main body: As an example for chronic disease care, MASK (Mobile Airways Sentinel Network), a new project of the ARIA (Allergic Rhinitis and its Impact on Asthma) initiative, and POLLAR (Impact of Air POLLution on Asthma and Rhinitis, EIT Health), in collaboration with professional and patient organizations in the field of allergy and airway diseases, are proposing real-life ICPs centred around the patient with rhinitis, and using mHealth to monitor environmental exposure. Three aspects of care pathways are being developed: (i) Patient participation, health literacy and self-care through technology-assisted “patient activation”, (ii) Implementation of care pathways by pharmacists and (iii) Next-generation guidelines assessing the recommendations of GRADE guidelines in rhinitis and asthma using real-world evidence (RWE) obtained through mobile technology. The EU and global political agendas are of great importance in supporting the digital transformation of health and care, and MASK has been recognized by DG Santé as a Good Practice in the field of digitally-enabled, integrated, person-centred care.

Conclusion: In 20 years, ARIA has considerably evolved from the first multimorbidity guideline in respiratory diseases to the digital transformation of health and care with a strong political involvement.

Keywords: Health care transformation, Care pathways, Rhinitis, ARIA, MASK, POLLAR

Background

In all societies, the burden and cost of non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are increasing rapidly as advances in sanitation, public health measures and clinical care result in changes in demography [1]. Most, if not all, economies are struggling to deliver modern health care effectively

[2]. Budgets will continue to be challenged with the move towards universal health coverage as demand increases and newer, more expensive technologies become available [3–5]. Traditional programmes, heavily reliant on specialist and supporting services, are becoming unaffordable. Innovative solutions are required to alleviate

system wide pressures [6, 7]. There is a need to support authorities in the transformation of the health care system into integrated care with organizational health literacy [8].

Integrated care pathways (ICPs) are structured multidisciplinary care plans detailing the key steps of patient care [9]. They promote the translation of guideline recommendations into local protocols and their application to clinical practice. They may be of particular interest in patients with multimorbidities since guidelines rarely consider them appropriately [10, 11]. An ICP forms all or part of the clinical record, documents the care given, and facilitates the evaluation of outcomes for continuous quality improvement [12]. ICPs should be carried out by a multidisciplinary team including physicians, pharmacists [13, 14] and allied health care professionals [15]. ICPs should integrate recommendations from clinical practice guidelines, but they usually (i) enhance recommendations by combining interventions, integrating quality assurance and (ii) describe co-ordination of care. Self-care and shared decision making are at the forefront of ICPs with the aim of empowering patients and their (professional and lay) care givers.

Rhinitis and asthma multimorbidity can be used as a model for chronic diseases since there is a broad agreement on the 'gold standard' of care [16–18]. In allergic rhinitis (AR) and asthma, adherence to treatment is a major unresolved problem [19, 20]. The vast majority of physicians prescribe regular treatment but patients (and physicians when they are allergic [21]) do not adhere to the advice. Instead of they self-treat based on personal experience as suggested by real-world data [19, 22]. There is thus a major disconnect between physicians and patients, either because of the clinical approach utilised or due to a lack of patient health literacy, with insufficient shared decision making (SDM). On-demand (prn) approaches are now proposed in both diseases [23–25] and represent a major change from previous recommendations. This new approach should be integrated in ICPs, but it needs to be applied to self-management and based on solid evidence.

ICPs have been proposed with a focus on new technologies that, through personally-held data on tablet devices and recording of 'symptom load', should enhance self-management and adherence to guidelines and ICPs. The science of supporting self-care and ICPs through mobile devices (mHealth) is in its infancy, but preliminary results are encouraging [26–28]. In the context of asthma, a systematic review showed that mobile apps were generally as effective as traditional models of supported self-management, but that they may be preferred in some clinical and demographic contexts as being convenient as well as efficient for the patient and the professional [29]. Standardisation and the establishment of the

Privacy Code of Conduct for mHealth apps [25] will be important in ensuring patients on the safeguard of their data and in helping them choose reliable technological tools, which will be essential for ICP implementation.

As an example for chronic disease care, a new development of the ARIA initiative (ARIA phase 4) [30], along with POLLAR (Impact of Air POLLution on Asthma and Rhinitis), in collaboration with professional and patient organizations in the field of allergy and airway diseases, are proposing real-life ICPs centred around the patient with rhinitis, and using mHealth to monitor environmental exposure.

The current document was finalized and reviewed during a meeting involving ARIA, POLLAR (Impact of Air POLLution on Asthma and Rhinitis (EIT Health)), the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing and the Global Alliance against Chronic Respiratory Diseases (GARD, WHO Alliance). Major allergy societies and patient's organizations participated in this meeting (Paris, December 3, 2018). The event was carried out with the support of many organizations (Fig. 1).

The gaps in allergic rhinitis and asthma

AR is the most common chronic disease worldwide. Treatment guidelines have improved the knowledge on rhinitis and have had a significant impact on AR management. However, many patients still fail to achieve sufficient symptom control [31] and the costs for society are enormous, in particular due to a major impact on school and work productivity [32] and on allergic or non-allergic multimorbidities [33, 34]. Allergic Rhinitis and its Impact on Asthma (ARIA) has promoted the use of its recommendations [16, 35, 36] to be integrated in ICPs using mobile technology in AR and asthma multimorbidity across the life cycle [37].

The clinical problem is that a large number of AR patients do not consult physicians because they think their symptoms are 'normal' and/or trivial, even though AR negatively impacts social life, school and work productivity [36]. Many AR patients rely on over-the-counter (OTC) drugs and do not see the need to consult with physicians [38–41]. The vast majority of patients who visit general practitioners (GPs) or specialists have moderate-to-severe rhinitis [42–46]. ICPs should take this reality into account and consider a multi-disciplinary approach as proposed by AIRWAYS ICPs (Fig. 2).

Supported self-management

People with AR and asthma are, by default, making day-to-day decisions about the management of their condition (avoiding triggers, using various treatments and seeking professional advice). Reflecting this broad concept, self-management is defined as "the tasks that individuals must



Fig. 1 Organizations supporting the meeting

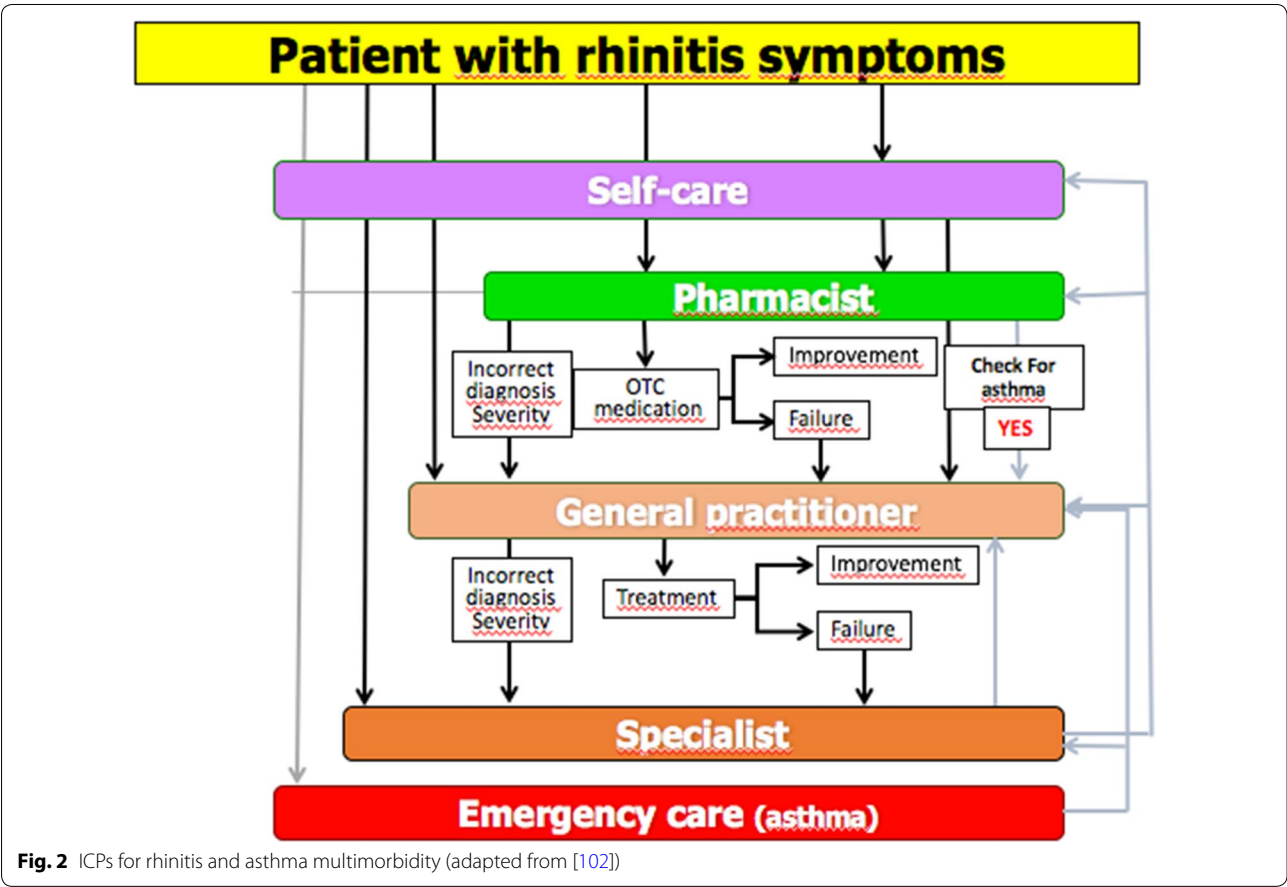


Fig. 2 ICPs for rhinitis and asthma multimorbidity (adapted from [102])

undertake to live well with one or more chronic conditions. These tasks include having the confidence to deal with the medical management, role management and emotional management of their conditions” [47].

The term self-care includes generic “healthy lifestyle behaviours required for human development and functioning” [48]. However, self-care and self-management overlap as, for example, smoking cessation is a generic

self-care behaviour and a component of self-management for people with respiratory conditions.

Self-management support is the assistance that professionals (pharmacy, primary care, specialist), patient's organizations and other sources of information, as well as informal caregivers, give patients in order to make decisions about their condition and to manage disease and health-related tasks [49]. A taxonomy of 14 components of self-management support [50] offers a pick-list of activities that may be considered when planning self-management. These could be practical activities (e.g. teaching inhaler technique, discussing an action plan, helping to quit smoking) and imply SDM [50]. Mobile technology has the potential to contribute to many aspects of the supported self-management of chronic diseases [51].

Supported self-management is a 'key principle' for ICPs in long-term conditions [52, 53]. This not only reflects the paradigm shift towards SDM, but also includes pragmatic, economic imperatives, as healthcare systems respond to the increasing NCD burden. The economic impact of effective supported self-management goes beyond healthcare savings. For example, major economic return can be in the workplace where absenteeism and, more importantly, presenteeism are reduced [32] leading to an increased productivity.

Patient activation, defined as the "knowledge, skills and confidence a person has in managing his/her own health and health care" [54], is a goal of many ICP models. "Activation" encompasses the patients' beliefs about their ability to self-manage (self-efficacy) and the likelihood that they will put these beliefs into action. Levels of activation range from the disengaged patients who let others manage their condition to the fully "activated" patients who embrace SDM and manage their health in partnership with their healthcare advisors, understanding the escalation of treatment options and when to seek pharmacy or medical advice. Higher levels of activation have been associated with better process and health outcomes in adults [55] and there is some evidence that appropriately-targeted self-management support may be more beneficial to disadvantaged groups than to higher literacy/socioeconomic status patients.

Although ARIA appears to meet the patient's needs, real-life data obtained using the *Allergy Diary* (MASK-air®) app from around 10,000 people in 23 countries (Argentina, Austria, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Mexico, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, UK. Brazil is a developing country) have shown that very few patients are being treated according to guidelines and that they often self-medicate [19]. Self-medication is

the treatment of common health problems with medicines without medical supervision. It is important to ensure that well-written, short and accurate self-management information is available for people to pick up in pharmacies, or for download. In the case of AR, many patients have prescribed medications at home and, when symptoms occur, they use them. Self-care and SDM centred around the patient should be used more often [56]. ARIA has already followed a change management (CM) strategy embedding the AR-asthma multimorbidity in every day practice [30], but a new CM is now being considered to increase the benefits of self-care and SDM in ICPs using currently-available IT tools. In the case of AR and asthma multimorbidity, aeroallergen exposure and pollution impact disease control and medications. However, there is currently no ICP in airway diseases that takes such environmental parameters into account [57]. These initiatives should prepare and support individuals, teams and organizations in making organizational change centred around the patient.

mHealth, such as apps running on consumer smart devices, is becoming increasingly popular and has the potential to profoundly affect health care and health outcomes [58]. Several apps exist for AR and asthma [59–63]. A review of the Apps in the field of allergic diseases has recently been completed (Matricardi et al. in preparation). One of the reviews—MASK (Mobile Airways Sentinel Network), the Phase 3 ARIA initiative [37, 64]—is based on the freely-available MASK app (*the Allergy Diary*, Android and iOS platforms) for AR and asthma. Importantly, MASK is available in 17 languages and deployed in 23 countries [64]. Data from 26,000 users reporting over 200,000 days of treatment are available. It complies with the recent General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR) enforced by the EU, May 25, 2018 [65]. The GDPR aims primarily to give control to citizens and residents over their personal data and to simplify the regulatory environment by unifying the regulation within the EU [66, 67]. Importantly, MASK enables the assessment of treatment patterns in real life and provides detailed information on treatment, given that the *Allergy Diary* is able to distinguish between AR medications [19].

On-line information

Most patients check on-line to help them decide what the problem is and how to address it. This is a crucial self-management area of support and we need to think about how it can be optimized. Because of the multiplicity of sources and the lack of reliability control, it should be recognized that such a task would require an enormous effort. Consequently, it has been abandoned by many

other bodies/disease areas. One approach that may be of value in improving reliability would be to focus on sites that provide useful information and generate an accreditation process with international standing.

Pharmacist care

Pharmacists are trusted health care professionals. Most patients with rhinitis are seen by pharmacists who are the initial point of contact of AR management in most countries. Depending on the country, few or most AR medications are available over-the-counter (OTC) [68–71] and are used by many patients. Therefore, as trusted health care professionals in the community, pharmacists are well placed to play a critical role identifying the symptoms of AR, recommending appropriate OTC treatment [38, 39, 41] and integrating health care teams through ICPs [13, 14]. The specific role of pharmacists in the management of AR within ICPs can be evidenced from several strategies that have been initiated [72] or completed and from studies confirming the important impact of pharmacist interventions on AR outcomes [40, 70, 73–80].

ARIA in the pharmacy 2004 [38] is being revised in order to propose ICPs involving a multi-disciplinary approach. This paper has been built on the evidence and provides tools intended to help pharmacists give optimal advice/interventions/strategies to patients with rhinitis. The ARIA-pharmacy ICP includes a diagnostic questionnaire specifically focusing attention on key symptoms and markers of the disease, a systematic Diagnosis Guide (including a differential diagnosis) and a simple flow-chart proposing treatment for rhinitis and asthma multimorbidity. Key prompts for referral within the ICP are included. The use of technology is critical for enhancing the management of AR. The ARIA-pharmacy ICP should be adapted to local health care environments/situations as large regional or national differences in pharmacy-based care exist.

Next-generation guidelines

Practice guidelines contain evidence-based statements about treatment, tests, public health actions and policy decisions intended to assist recipients of care and their care providers in making informed decisions.

ARIA was one of the first chronic respiratory disease guidelines to adopt the GRADE (Grading of Recommendation, Assessment, Development and Evaluation) approach, an advanced evidence evaluation and development approach for guidelines [16, 81–83]. GRADE-based guidelines are available for AR from other organizations and their recommendations are similar [16–18]. However, a limitation of GRADE is that evidence often lacks applicability because the populations studied do not

reflect most of the patients seen in primary care [84]. The GRADE recommendations are often based on RCT in which patients regularly use their treatment, whereas most AR or asthma patients are non-adherent. GRADE rarely includes recommendations based on implementation research.

The more recently completed work by the GRADE working group on its Evidence to Decision Frameworks requires that guideline developers regularly address implementation and monitoring strategies [85–89]. Searching for and synthesizing evidence of effective implementation strategies enabled the BTS/SIGN asthma guideline to make a recommendation on how supported self-management for asthma could be embedded into routine practice [90]. Strategies include proactively engaging and empowering patients, training and motivating professionals as well as providing an environment that promotes self-management and monitors implementation [91]. In AR, cluster-randomized controlled trials have confirmed the overall value of guidelines [92, 93]. However, there has been only one direct testing of individual guideline recommendations in real-life studies in an effort to achieve optimization [94].

Next-generation ARIA-GRADE guidelines should consider testing the recommendations based on the GRADE approach with real-world evidence (RWE) using data obtained by mHealth tools such as MASK in order to confirm the efficiency or to refine current GRADE-based recommendations. The first results of MASK confirm the feasibility of the project [19]. Adherence to treatment is very low as <5% of users record symptoms and medications for a period of 2 weeks. This indicates that it is important to further test whether on-demand is equally or even more efficient than regular-continuous treatment and that guidelines should consider both regular and on-demand treatment [19, 95].

Guideline recommendations often address isolated questions or focus on a single disease or problem. They should be considered in the context of the many decisions that are made. ICPs try to address the multiple options and iterative changes in a patient's status and problems. Guideline recommendations should support these iterative changes.

The key challenge for conventional treatment guidelines is that available evidence, both from randomized trials and non-randomized studies, does not usually address the complex pathways, but only affects isolated decision points within a pathway. For example, when an oral H₁-antihistamine is not achieving symptom control, we propose to replace it by an intra-nasal corticosteroid. However, this is often not the way that studies are designed and not how patients use these medications.

Assuming that properly developed pathways require evidence, our guidelines must start identifying the best available evidence to support decision points. When the evidence is indirect, which is frequently the case, connecting the relevant decision points and considering all of that evidence together results in low certainty on the overall structure and timing of an ICP.

The next-generation guidelines, if complemented by the intelligent use of tools such as MASK, which records patients' symptoms and provides advice at given time points to follow ICPs, could exemplify unique new tools to both implement and evaluate recommendations in the context of pathways. Studies should be carried out in which patients are randomized to ICPs or to follow ARIA recommendations that are not presented as pathways. Such studies will provide both information on the use of the recommendations and on the usefulness of the pathways. Through implementation of recommendations, we will be able to increase our certainty in the evidence by evaluating the entire pathway and measuring outcomes in direct population-based studies that record what patients do as opposed to what clinicians prescribe (and patients do not do).

Study proposals of ARIA phase 4 and POLLAR

ARIA Phase 4 is the change management strategy for AR and asthma [96]. POLLAR is an EIT-Health (European Institute for Innovation and technology) project which aims to better understand, prevent and manage the impact of air pollution and allergen exposure on airway diseases [57]. POLLAR will use the MASK App, which is a Good Practice [64]. One of the POLLAR work-packages is the development of ICPs integrating aerobiology and air pollution. This will be developed using a stepwise approach centred around the patient. The four-step project is a WHO Global Alliance against Chronic Respiratory Diseases (GARD) demonstration project.

Step 1: First meeting (December 3, 2018, Paris): Development of next-generation ICPs with a focus on self-management, pharmacy care and next-generation guidelines

The Paris meeting addressed a number of areas as delineated below (Fig. 3).

Step 2: 2019–2021: Further development and implementation of next-generation ICPs

1. Develop a strategic and practical approach to improving patient autonomy and self-management programmes.

2. Deploy to other chronic respiratory diseases (asthma, COPD and rhinosinusitis [97]) and NCDs developing a multimorbidity App based on MASK expertise and experience.
3. Develop documents for specific age groups: pre-school and school children, older adults.
4. Establish a best practice across several regions in the EU linking the study to policy makers aiming to improve air quality and outcomes in their population.

Step 3: Second meeting (December 2019): Embedding environmental data in next-generation ICPs

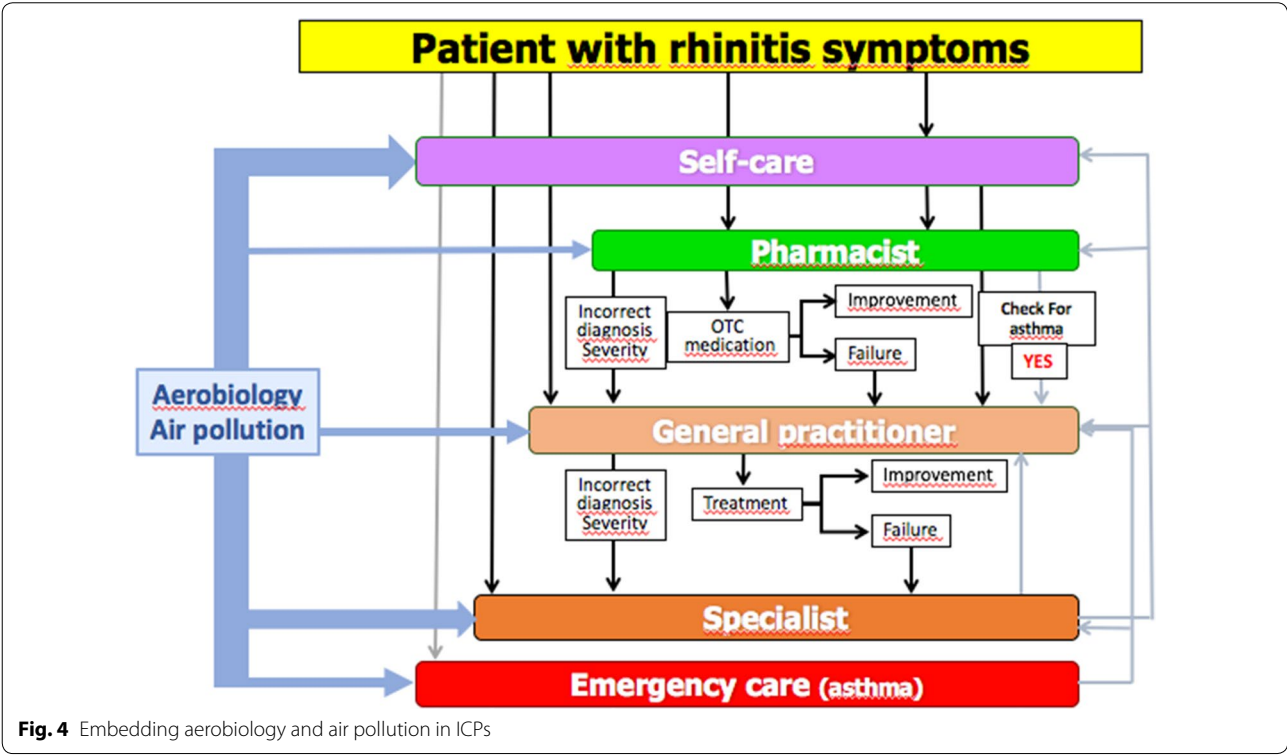
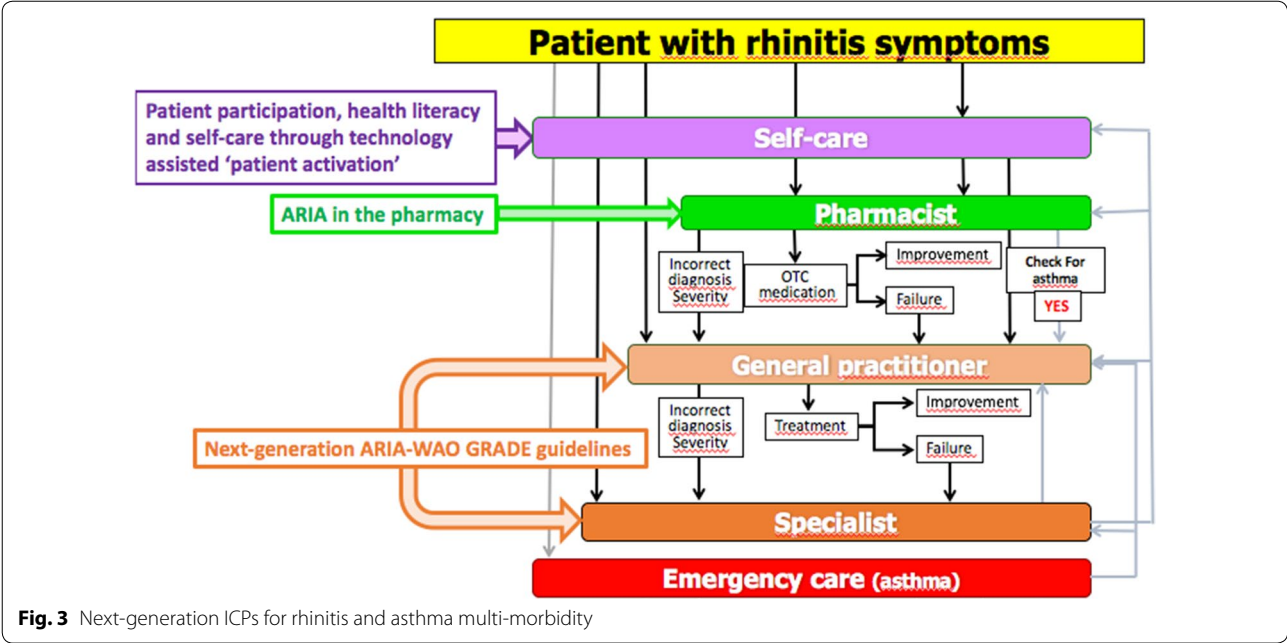
Using the results obtained by POLLAR for air pollution, a second meeting will be held to integrate aerobiology and air pollution data in mobile technology and to propose ICPs for the prevention of severe exacerbations and asthma during peaks of allergens and/or pollution. This meeting will also consider the deployment to other chronic diseases (Fig. 4) and the impact of biodiversity in chronic diseases [98].

Embedding next-generation care pathways in the EU and global political agendas for allergic and chronic respiratory diseases

The Polish Presidency of the EU Council (2011) targeted CRDs in children to promote their early recognition, prevention and management to ultimately impact active and healthy ageing (AHA) [99]. The developmental determinants of CRDs in ageing were reinforced during the Cyprus Presidency of the EU Council "Healthy ageing across the lifecycle" (2012) [100] and an EU-NIH meeting held in Montpellier (2013) [101].

The objective of AIRWAYS-ICPs [102] was to launch a collaboration to develop multi-sectoral ICPs for CRDs in European countries and regions. AIRWAYS-ICPs was initiated in 2014 by the European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing (EIP on AHA, DG Santé and DG CONNECT) [103] as a GARD (Global Alliance against Chronic Respiratory Diseases) demonstration project [104]. In collaboration with GARD, the Directorate General of Health of Portugal, the EIP on AHA and the Région Occitanie (France), a high-level meeting was organized July 1, 2015 with all major European scientific societies and patient's organizations in Lisbon to review the implementation results of AIRWAYS ICPs [105].

Euforea (European Forum for Research and Education in Allergy and Airway Diseases) [56] proposed an annual stepwise strategy at the EU or ministerial levels. A European Symposium on Precision Medicine in Allergy and Airways Diseases was held at the EU Parliament October 14, 2015 [106]. Another EU Parliament meeting was held



in Brussels March 29, 2017 on the Prevention and Self-Management of CRDs using novel mobile health tools [37, 56, 97].

POLLAR (Impact of air POLLution on Asthma and Rhinitis, EIT Health) is focusing on the impact of

allergens and air pollution on airway diseases and aims to propose novel ICPs integrating pollution, sleep and patients' literacy and to assess the societal implications of the interaction [57].

Euforea organized an EU Summit in Vilnius, Lithuania (March 2018) in collaboration with the Ministers of Health of Lithuania, Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine. The aim was to discuss and start the implementation of the POLLAR concepts, and to deploy it to EU neighboring countries. The Vilnius Declaration on Chronic Respiratory Diseases proposed multisectoral ICPs embedding guided self-management, mHealth and air pollution in CRDs [107].

The joint meeting discussed in this report (December 3, 2018) proposed next-generation care pathways based on the Vilnius Declaration.

MASK has been selected by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Health and Food Safety (DG SANTE) and the newly-established Commission Expert Group "Steering Group on Health Promotion, Disease Prevention and Management of Non-Communicable Diseases" as a Good Practice (GP) in the field of digitally-enabled, integrated, person-centred care.

On May 3, 2019, a Euforea-led meeting took place in the Parliament of Malta to review the results of the December 3 meeting and to propose practical strategies at the EU and global levels with GARD.

This new next-generation care pathway is completely aligned with the recommendations issued by the Thematic Network SHAFÉ—Smart Healthy Age-Friendly Environments (approved by the European Commission—DG SANTE and DG CONNECT)—on its Joint Statement delivered 12th November 2018. The Statement underlined the need to patient empowerment and active involvement in its healthcare process and also urged the use of lifestyle medicine that provides effective impact on the patient's wellbeing.

Conclusions

There is a need to support the digital transformation of health and care with integrated care. An innovative patient-centered approach is proposed by the ARIA expert group for rhinitis and asthma multimorbidity to be scaled up to chronic diseases.

Additional file

[Additional file 1.](#) The MASK Study Group.

Abbreviations

AIRWAYS ICPs: integrated care pathways for airway diseases; AR: allergic rhinitis; ARIA: Allergic Rhinitis and its Impact on Asthma; BTS/SIGN: British Thoracic Society/Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network; CRD: chronic respiratory diseases; EIP on AHA: European Innovation Partnership on Active and Healthy Ageing; EIT-Health: European Institute for Innovation and technology-Health;

Euforea: European Forum for Research and Education in Allergy and Airway Diseases; GARD: Global Alliance against Chronic Respiratory Diseases; GDPR: General Data Privacy Regulation; GLASS-ARIA: Global Allergy Simple Solution; GP: general practitioner; GRADE: Grading of Recommendation, Assessment, Development and Evaluation; ICP: integrated care pathways; MASK: Mobile Airways Sentinel Network; MHealth: mobile health; OTC: over-the-counter; PG: pocket guides; POLLAR: Impact of Air POLLution in Asthma and Rhinitis; RWE: Real World Evidence; SDM: shared decision making; WAO: World Allergy Organization; WHO: World Health Organization.

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MASK Study group

See Additional file 1.

Authors' contributions

All authors are MASK members and have contributed to the design of the project. Many authors also included users and disseminated the project in their own country. Moreover, JB, HJ, AT, ME, TZ, IA, IJA, JMA, CB, SBA, IB, GB, EC, AAC, WC, WJF, JF, MI, LK, VK, LTT, DLL, DL, OML, EM, JM, YO, NP, NPT, HP, CR, BS, STS, IT, AV, AAM, MTV, SW, SW, XB, AB, SB, NB, GWC, VC, AMC, LC, AMCS, DC, EC, ME, GM, JM, EM, LM, GO, JLP, FP, DS, RvdK, AZ participated in the meeting held in Paris, December 3, 2018. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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Author details

¹ MACVIA-France, Fondation Partenariale FMC VIA-LR, CHU, 34295 Montpellier Cedex 5, France. ² INSERM U 1168, VIMA: Ageing and Chronic Diseases Epidemiological and Public Health Approaches, Villejuif Université Versailles St-Quentin-en-Yvelines, UMR-S 1168, Montigny Le Bretonneux, France. ³ European Forum for Research and Education in Allergy and Airway Diseases (EUFOREA), Brussels, Belgium. ⁴ Charité-Universitätsmedizin Berlin, Corporate Member of Freie Universität Berlin, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany. ⁵ Department of Dermatology and Allergy Member of GA2LEN, Comprehensive Allergy-Centre, Berlin Institute of Health, Berlin, Germany. ⁶ Department of Clinical Epidemiology and Biostatistics, McMaster University, Hamilton, ON, Canada. ⁷ Division of Allergy, Immunology, and Transplantation (DAIT), National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, NIH, Bethesda,

USA. ⁸ National Institute for Health and Welfare, Helsinki, Finland. ⁹ Dept of Otorhinolaryngology, Univ Hospitals Leuven, Louvain, Belgium. ¹⁰ Academic Medical Center, Univ of Amsterdam, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. ¹¹ Faculty of Medicine, Transylvania University, Brasov, Romania. ¹² Department of Allergy and Immunology, Hospital Quirónsalud Bizkaia, Erandio, Spain. ¹³ ISGlobAL, Centre for Research in Environmental Epidemiology (CREAL), Barcelona, Spain. ¹⁴ IMIM (Hospital del Mar Research Institute), Barcelona, Spain. ¹⁵ CIBER Epidemiología y Salud Pública (CIBERESP), Barcelona, Spain. ¹⁶ Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF), Barcelona, Spain. ¹⁷ Upper Airways Research Laboratory, ENT Dept, Ghent University Hospital, Ghent, Belgium. ¹⁸ Dept of Otolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery, University of Mainz, Mainz, Germany. ¹⁹ Hospital Civil de Guadalajara Dr Juan I Menchaca, Guadalajara, Mexico. ²⁰ iQ4U Consultants Ltd, London, UK. ²¹ Woolcock Institute of Medical Research, University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia. ²² Woolcock Emphysema Centre, Sydney, Australia. ²³ Sydney Local Health District, Glebe, NSW, Australia. ²⁴ La Rochelle, France. ²⁵ Quebec Heart and Lung Institute, Laval University, Quebec City, QC, Canada. ²⁶ EIT Health France, Paris, France. ²⁷ Dept of Respiratory Medicine, Ghent University Hospital, Ghent, Belgium. ²⁸ Department of Public Health and Primary Care, Leiden University Medical Center, Leiden, The Netherlands. ²⁹ UCIBIO, REQUINTE, Faculty of Pharmacy and Competence Center on Active and Healthy Ageing of University of Porto (Porto4Ageing), Porto, Portugal. ³⁰ ProAR-Núcleo de Excelencia em Asma, Federal University of Bahia, Bahia, Brazil. ³¹ WHO GARD Planning Group, Salvador, Brazil. ³² Medical Consulting Czarlewski, Levallois, France. ³³ Department of Otorhinolaryngology, Amsterdam University Medical Centres, AMC, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. ³⁴ CINTESIS, Center for Research in Health Technology and Information Systems, Faculdade de Medicina da Universidade do Porto, Porto, Portugal. ³⁵ Medida, Lda Porto, Portugal. ³⁶ ERS President 2017-2018, Athens Chest Hospital, 7th Resp Med Dept and Asthma Center, Athens, Greece. ³⁷ Skin and Allergy Hospital, Helsinki University Hospital and University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland. ³⁸ Division for Health Innovation, Campania Region and Federico II University Hospital Naples (R & D and DISMET), Naples, Italy. ³⁹ Center for Rhinology and Allergology, Wiesbaden, Germany. ⁴⁰ Division of Internal Medicine, Asthma and Allergy, Barlicki University Hospital, Medical University of Lodz, Łódź, Poland. ⁴¹ Faculty of Medicine, Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania. ⁴² University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Hochiminh City, Vietnam. ⁴³ Center of Excellence in Asthma and Allergy, Médica Sur Clinical Foundation and Hospital, México City, Mexico. ⁴⁴ KYomed INNOV, Montpellier, France. ⁴⁵ Faculty of Health Sciences and CICS-UBI, Health Sciences Research Centre, University of Beira Interior, Covilhã, Portugal. ⁴⁶ CIRFF, Federico II University, Naples, Italy. ⁴⁷ Rhinology Unit & Snell Clinic, ENT Department, Hospital Clínic, Barcelona, Spain. ⁴⁸ Clinical & Experimental Respiratory Immunology, IDIBAPS, CIBERES, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain. ⁴⁹ Dept of Otorhinolaryngology, Chiba University Hospital, Chiba, Japan. ⁵⁰ Division of Infection, Immunity & Respiratory Medicine, Royal Manchester Children's Hospital, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK. ⁵¹ Allergy Department, 2nd Pediatric Clinic, Athens General Children's Hospital "P&A Kyriakou", University of Athens, Athens, Greece. ⁵² Allergy Department, Pasteur Institute, Paris, France. ⁵³ Conseil Général de l'Economie Ministère de l'Economie, de l'Industrie et du Numérique, Paris, France. ⁵⁴ The Usher Institute of Population Health Sciences and Informatics, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK. ⁵⁵ Pneumologie et Soins Intensifs Respiratoires, Hôpitaux Universitaires Paris, Centre Hôpital Cochin, Paris, France. ⁵⁶ Department of Internal Medicine, Medical University of Graz, Graz, Austria. ⁵⁷ Association Asthme et Allergie, Paris, France. ⁵⁸ Department of Prevention of Environmental Hazards and Allergology, Medical University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland. ⁵⁹ Health Planning Unit, Department of Social Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Crete, Crete, Greece. ⁶⁰ International Primary Care Respiratory Group IPCRG, Aberdeen, Scotland, UK. ⁶¹ Institute of Clinical Medicine & Institute of Health Sciences, Vilnius University Faculty of Medicine, Vilnius, Lithuania. ⁶² Department of Lung Diseases and Clinical Immunology, University of Turku and Terveystalo Allergy Clinic, Turku, Finland. ⁶³ FILHA, Finnish Lung Association, Helsinki, Finland. ⁶⁴ Unit of Geriatric Immunology, University of Bari Medical School, Bari, Italy. ⁶⁵ Asthma UK, Mansell Street, London, UK. ⁶⁶ Swiss Institute of Allergy and Asthma Research (SIAR), University of Zurich, Davos, Switzerland. ⁶⁷ Epidemiology of Allergic and Respiratory Diseases, Department Institute Pierre Louis of Epidemiology and Public Health, INSERM and Sorbonne Université, Medical School Saint Antoine, Paris, France. ⁶⁸ Department of Medicine, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa. ⁶⁹ Dept of Respiratory Medicine, National Institute of Diseases of the Chest and Hospital, Dhaka, Bangladesh. ⁷⁰ National Center

- of Expertise in Cognitive Stimulation (CEN STIMCO), Broca Hospital, Paris, France. ⁷¹ Department of Biochemistry and Clinical Chemistry, Faculty of Pharmacy with the Division of Laboratory Medicine, Warsaw Medical University, Warsaw, Poland. ⁷² Global Alliance against Chronic Respiratory Diseases (WHO GARD), Joensuu, Finland. ⁷³ Department of Dermatology and Allergy Centre, Odense University Hospital, Odense Research Center for Anaphylaxis (ORCA), Odense, Denmark. ⁷⁴ Termofischer Scientific, Uppsala, Sweden. ⁷⁵ Department of Respiratory Medicine and Allergology, University Hospital, Lund, Sweden. ⁷⁶ Department of Geriatrics, Montpellier University hospital, Montpellier, France. ⁷⁷ EA 2991 Euromov, University Montpellier, Montpellier, France. ⁷⁸ UOC Pneumologia, Istituto di Medicina Interna, F Policlinico Gemelli IRCCS, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Rome, Italy. ⁷⁹ National Heart and Lung Institute, Royal Brompton Hospital & Imperial College, London, UK. ⁸⁰ CHU, Dijon, France. ⁸¹ Clinical Medicine, Laval's University, Quebec City, Canada. ⁸² Medicine Department, Hôpital de la Malbaie, Quebec city, QC, Canada. ⁸³ Department of Clinical Pharmacy of Lithuanian, University of Health, Kaunas, Lithuania. ⁸⁴ Institute of Lung Health, Respiratory Biomedical Unit, University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust, Leicestershire, UK. ⁸⁵ Department of Infection, Immunity and Inflammation, University of Leicester, Leicester, UK. ⁸⁶ Universitätsmedizin der Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, Mainz, Germany. ⁸⁷ Municipality Pharmacy, Sarno, Italy. ⁸⁸ Personalized Medicine Clinic Asthma & Allergy, Humanitas University, Humanitas Research Hospital, Rozzano, Milan, Italy. ⁸⁹ Allergy Section, Department of Internal Medicine, Hospital Vall d'Hebron & ARADyAL Research Network, Barcelona, Spain. ⁹⁰ Regional Ministry of Health of Andalusia, Seville, Spain. ⁹¹ Allergy and Asthma Associates of Southern California, Mission Viejo, CA, USA. ⁹² ASA-Advanced Solutions Accelerator, Clapiers, France. ⁹³ Division of Allergy/Immunology, University of South Florida, Tampa, FL, USA. ⁹⁴ SOS Allergology and Clinical Immunology, USL Toscana Centro, Prato, Italy. ⁹⁵ Allergy and Immunology Laboratory, Metropolitan University, Simon Bolívar University, Barranquilla, Colombia. ⁹⁶ SLaa, Sociedad Latinoamericana de Alergia, Asma e Immunologia, Barranquilla, Colombia. ⁹⁷ Chachava Clinic, David Tvildiani Medical University-AIETI Medical School, Grigol Robakidze University, Tbilisi, Georgia. ⁹⁸ Medical Faculty, ENT Department, Eskisehir Osmangazi University, Eskisehir, Turkey. ⁹⁹ Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Belfast, Northern Ireland, UK. ¹⁰⁰ Life and Health Sciences Research Institute (ICVS), School of Medicine, University of Minho, Braga, Portugal. ¹⁰¹ PT Government Associate Laboratory, ICVS/3B's, Braga/Guimarães, Portugal. ¹⁰² Ecole des Mines, Alès, France. ¹⁰³ Centre for Respiratory Medicine and Allergy, Institute of Inflammation and Repair, University of Manchester and University Hospital of South Manchester, Manchester, UK. ¹⁰⁴ Division of Respiratory and Allergic Diseases, Department of Respiratory Diseases, High Specialty Hospital A.Cardarelli, Naples, Italy. ¹⁰⁵ Allergy Service, University Hospital of Federal University of Santa Catarina (HU-UFSC), Florianópolis, Brazil. ¹⁰⁶ Caritas Diocesana de Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal. ¹⁰⁷ Ageing@Coimbra EIP-AHA Reference Site, Coimbra, Portugal. ¹⁰⁸ Medical Faculty Skopje, University Clinic of Pulmonology and Allergy, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia. ¹⁰⁹ Sleep Unit, Department of Neurology, Hôpital Gui-de-Chauliac Montpellier, Inserm U1061, Montpellier, France. ¹¹⁰ AQUAS, Barcelona, Spain. ¹¹¹ EUREGHA, European Regional and Local Health Association, Brussels, Belgium. ¹¹² Department of Medicine, Surgery and Dentistry "Scuola Medica Salernitana", University of Salerno, Salerno, Italy. ¹¹³ UPRES EA220, Pôle des Maladies des Voies Respiratoires, Hôpital Foch, Université Paris-Saclay, Suresnes, France. ¹¹⁴ Farmacie Dei Golfi Group, Massa Lubrense, Italy. ¹¹⁵ Section of Allergy and Immunology, Saint Louis University School of Medicine, Saint Louis, MO, USA. ¹¹⁶ Clinic of Infectious, Chest Diseases, Dermatology and Allergology, Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania. ¹¹⁷ Clinical Research Center for Allergy and Rheumatology, Sagami National Hospital, Sagami, Japan. ¹¹⁸ Pediatric Allergy and Immunology Unit, Children's hospital, Ain Shams University, Cairo, Egypt. ¹¹⁹ Clinic of Children's Diseases, Faculty of Medicine, Vilnius University, Vilnius, Lithuania. ¹²⁰ Global Allergy and Asthma Platform GAAPP, Vienna, Austria. ¹²¹ Division of Allergy, Department of Pediatric Medicine, The Bambino Gesù Children's Research Hospital Holy See, Rome, Italy. ¹²² Reims, France. ¹²³ Department of Pulmonary Diseases, Istanbul University-Cerrahpasa, Cerrahpasa Faculty of Medicine, Istanbul, Turkey. ¹²⁴ Allergy Unit, Department of Dermatology, University Hospital of Zurich, Zurich, Switzerland. ¹²⁵ National Center for Disease Control and Public Health of Georgia, Tbilisi, Georgia. ¹²⁶ Allergy & Asthma Unit, Hospital San Bernardo Salta, Salta, Argentina. ¹²⁷ Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León, San Nicolás de los Garza, Mexico. ¹²⁸ Center of Allergy and Immunology, Georgian Association of Allergology and Clinical Immunology, Tbilisi, Georgia. ¹²⁹ Institute of Health Policy and Management iBMG, Erasmus University, Rotterdam, The Netherlands. ¹³⁰ Immunology and Allergy Division, Clinical Hospital, University of Chile, Santiago, Chile. ¹³¹ Centich: Centre d'Expertise National des Technologies de l'Information et de la Communication pour l'Autonomie, Gérotopôle Autonomie Longévité des Pays de la Loire, Conseil Régional des Pays de la Loire, Centre d'Expertise Partenariat Européen d'Innovation pour un Vieillessement Actif et en Bonne Santé, Nantes, France. ¹³² Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. ¹³³ Université Paris-Sud; Service de Pneumologie, Hôpital Bicêtre, Inserm UMR_S999, Le Kremlin Bicêtre, France. ¹³⁴ Department of Medicine and Surgery, University of Salerno, Baronissi, Italy. ¹³⁵ Servicio de Alergia e Immunologia, Clinica Santa Isabel, Buenos Aires, Argentina. ¹³⁶ Hallym University College of Medicine, Hallym University Sacred Heart Hospital, Anyang, Gyeonggi-do, South Korea. ¹³⁷ Department of Clinical Immunology, Wrocław Medical University, Wrocław, Poland. ¹³⁸ Ukrainian Medical Stomatological Academy, Poltava, Ukraine. ¹³⁹ Pediatric Allergy and Asthma Unit, Hacettepe University School of Medicine, Ankara, Turkey. ¹⁴⁰ First Department of Family Medicine, Medical University of Lodz, Łódź, Poland. ¹⁴¹ Institute of Social Medicine, Epidemiology and Health Economics, Charité-Universitätsmedizin Berlin, Berlin, Germany. ¹⁴² Institute for Clinical Epidemiology and Biometry, University of Würzburg, Würzburg, Germany. ¹⁴³ National Research Center, Institute of Immunology, Federal Medicobiological Agency, Laboratory of Molecular Immunology, Moscow, Russian Federation. ¹⁴⁴ GARD Chairman, Geneva, Switzerland. ¹⁴⁵ Allergy & Asthma Center Westend, Berlin, Germany. ¹⁴⁶ Department of Immunology and Allergy, Healthy Ageing Research Center, Medical University of Lodz, Łódź, Poland. ¹⁴⁷ Department of Clinical Science and Education, Södersjukhuset, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden. ¹⁴⁸ Sach's Children and Youth Hospital, Södersjukhuset, Stockholm, Sweden. ¹⁴⁹ Mattone Internazionale Program, Veneto Region, Italy. ¹⁵⁰ Departments of Internal Medicine and Pediatrics (Divisions of Allergy and Immunology), University of Tennessee College of Medicine, Germantown, TN, USA. ¹⁵¹ Scottish Centre for Respiratory Research, Cardiovascular & Diabetes Medicine, Medical Research Institute, Ninewells Hospital, University of Dundee, Dundee, UK. ¹⁵² Department of Paediatrics, Oslo University Hospital, Oslo, Norway. ¹⁵³ Faculty of Medicine, Institute of Clinical Medicine, University of Oslo, Oslo, Norway. ¹⁵⁴ Imunoalergologia, Centro Hospitalar Universitário de Coimbra and Faculty of Medicine, University of Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal. ¹⁵⁵ Department of Pulmonary Medicine, CHU Sart-Tilman, and GIGA I3 Research Group, Liege, Belgium. ¹⁵⁶ DG for Health and Social Care, Scottish Government, Edinburgh, UK. ¹⁵⁷ Department of Pulmonary Medicine, Rashid Hospital, Dubai, UAE. ¹⁵⁸ Coimbra Institute for Clinical and Biomedical Research (ICBR), Faculty of Medicine, University of Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal. ¹⁵⁹ Department of Medicine (RCSI), Bon Secours Hospital, Glasnevin, Dublin, Ireland. ¹⁶⁰ Kronikgune, International Centre of Excellence in Chronicity Research Barakaldo, Barakaldo, Bizkaia, Spain. ¹⁶¹ Division of Clinical Immunology and Allergy, Laboratory of Behavioral Immunology Research, The University of Mississippi Medical Center, Jackson, MS, USA. ¹⁶² Tobacco Control Research Centre, Iranian Anti Tobacco Association, Tehran, Iran. ¹⁶³ Argentine Association of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, Buenos Aires, Argentina. ¹⁶⁴ Department of Pediatric Pneumology and Immunology, AG Molecular Allergology and Immunomodulation, Charité Medical University, Berlin, Germany. ¹⁶⁵ Institute of Environmental Medicine, Karolinska Institutet, Stockholm, Sweden. ¹⁶⁶ PNDR, Portuguese National Programme for Respiratory Diseases, Faculdade de Medicina de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal. ¹⁶⁷ Allergy and Asthma Medical Group and Research Center, San Diego, CA, USA. ¹⁶⁸ Department of Physiology, CHRU, University Montpellier, Vice President for Research, PhyMedExp, INSERM U1046, CNRS, UMR 9214, Montpellier, France. ¹⁶⁹ Croatian Pulmonary Society, Zagreb, Croatia. ¹⁷⁰ National Institute of Pneumology M Nasta, Bucharest, Romania. ¹⁷¹ Clinic for Pulmonary Diseases, Clinical Center of Serbia, Faculty of Medicine, University of Belgrade, Serbian Association for Asthma and COPD, Belgrade, Serbia. ¹⁷² Regione Piemonte, Turin, Italy. ¹⁷³ Mexico City, Mexico. ¹⁷⁴ National Center for Research in Chronic Respiratory Diseases, Tishreen University School of Medicine, Latakia, Syria. ¹⁷⁵ Syrian Private University, Damascus, Syria. ¹⁷⁶ Faculty of Medicine and Surgery, University of Medicine, La Valette, Malta. ¹⁷⁷ Department of Medical Sciences, Allergy and Clinical Immunology Unit, University of Torino & Mauriziano Hospital, Turin, Italy. ¹⁷⁸ Allergy Center, CUF Descobertas Hospital, Lisbon, Portugal. ¹⁷⁹ Institute of Medical Statistics, and Computational Biology, Medical Faculty, University of Cologne, Cologne, Germany. ¹⁸⁰ CRI-Clinical Research International-Ltd, Hamburg, Germany. ¹⁸¹ Danish

Committee for Health Education, Copenhagen East, Denmark.¹⁸² Food Allergy Referral Centre Veneto Region, Department of Women and Child Health, Padua General University Hospital, Padua, Italy.¹⁸³ MedScript Ltd, Paraparomu, New Zealand.¹⁸⁴ OPC, Cambridge, UK.¹⁸⁵ Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, Baltimore, MD, USA.¹⁸⁶ Consortium of Pharmacies and Services COSAFER, Salerno, Italy.¹⁸⁷ Scientific Centre of Children's Health under the Russian Academy of Medical Sciences, Moscow, Russia.¹⁸⁸ Center of Allergy, Immunology and Respiratory Diseases, Santa Fe, Argentina.¹⁸⁹ Center for Allergy and Immunology, Santa Fe, Argentina.¹⁹⁰ Hospital of the Hospitalier Brothers in Buda, Budapest, Hungary.¹⁹¹ Die Hautambulanz und Rothhaar Study Center, Berlin, Germany.¹⁹² Department of Pharmacy, University of Naples Federico II, Naples, Italy.¹⁹³ ENT Department, University Hospital of Kinshasa, Kinshasa, Congo.¹⁹⁴ Department of Allergy, Immunology and Respiratory Medicine, Alfred Hospital and Central Clinical School, Monash University, Melbourne, VIC, Australia.¹⁹⁵ Dept of Otorhinology, Nippon Medical School, Tokyo, Japan.¹⁹⁶ Centre Hospitalier Universitaire Pédiatrique Charles de Gaulle, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.¹⁹⁷ Dept of Comparative Medicine, Messerli Research Institute of the University of Veterinary Medicine and Medical University, Vienna, Austria.¹⁹⁸ EFA European Federation of Allergy and Airways Diseases Patients' Associations, Brussels, Belgium.¹⁹⁹ Department of Immunology and Allergology, Faculty of Medicine and Faculty Hospital in Pilsen, Charles University in Prague, Pilsen, Czech Republic.²⁰⁰ Department of Allergy and Clinical Immunology, Ajou University School of Medicine, Suwon, South Korea.²⁰¹ Laboratoire HP2, Université Grenoble Alpes, Grenoble, France.²⁰² INSERM, U1042 and CHU de Grenoble, Grenoble, France.²⁰³ Allergy Unit, CUF-Porto Hospital and Institute, Porto, Portugal.²⁰⁴ Center for Research in Health Technologies and Information Systems, CINTESIS, Universidade do Porto, Porto, Portugal.²⁰⁵ Maladies Infectieuses et immunitaires, CHUL, Quebec City, QC, Canada.²⁰⁶ Department of Otorhinolaryngology, Head and Neck Surgery, Section of Rhinology and Allergy, University Hospital Marburg, Philipps-Universität Marburg, Marburg, Germany.²⁰⁷ Farmacias Holon, Lisbon, Portugal.²⁰⁸ Centre for Empowering Patients and Communities, Faulkland, Somerset, UK.²⁰⁹ Children's Hospital Srebrnjak, Zagreb, Croatia.²¹⁰ School of Medicine, University JJ. Strossmayer, Osijek, Croatia.²¹¹ University Hospital 'Sv Ivan Rilski', Sofia, Bulgaria.²¹² Academic Centre of Primary Care, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, Scotland, UK.²¹³ Research in Real-Life, Cambridge, UK.²¹⁴ Department of Otorhinolaryngology, University of Crete School of Medicine, Heraklion, Greece.²¹⁵ Department of Nephrology and Endocrinology, Karolinska University Hospital, Stockholm, Sweden.²¹⁶ Allergy Unit, Presidio Columbus, Catholic University of Sacred Heart, Rome, Italy.²¹⁷ IRCCS Oasi Maria SS, Troina, Italy.²¹⁸ Hospital de Clinicas, University of Parana, Paraná, Brazil.²¹⁹ Division of Allergy Asthma and Clinical Immunology, Emek Medical Center, Afula, Israel.²²⁰ Allergy and Respiratory Research Group, The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK.²²¹ Association of Finnish Pharmacists, Helsinki, Finland.²²² Allergy and Clinical Immunology Department, Centro Médico-Docente la Trinidad and Clínica El Ávila, Caracas, Venezuela.²²³ Sociedad Paraguaya de Alergia Asma e Inmunología, Asunción, Paraguay.²²⁴ Division of Allergy, Clinical Immunology and Rheumatology, Department of Pediatrics, Federal University of São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil.²²⁵ European Health Futures Forum (EHFF), Dromahair, UK.²²⁶ Kyrgyzstan National Centre of Cardiology and Internal Medicine, Euro-Asian Respiratory Society, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.²²⁷ Department of Respiratory Medicine, University Hospital Olomouc, Olomouc, Czech Republic.²²⁸ Pulmonary Division, Heart Institute (InCor), Hospital da Clinicas da Faculdade de Medicina da Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil.²²⁹ Department of Respiratory Medicine, Hvidovre Hospital & University of Copenhagen, Copenhagen, Denmark.²³⁰ RNSA (Réseau National de Surveillance Aérobiologique), Brussieu, France.²³¹ SidkKids Hospitala and Institute of Health Policy, Management and Evaluation, Toronto, Canada.²³² Department of ENT, Medical University of Graz, Graz, Austria.²³³ Pneumology and Allergy Department CIBERES and Clinical & Experimental Respiratory Immunology, IDIBAPS, University of Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain.²³⁴ Division of Immunopathology, Department of Pathophysiology and Allergy Research, Center for Pathophysiology, Infectiology and Immunology, Medical University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria.²³⁵ NRC Institute of Immunology FMBA of Russia, Moscow, Russia.²³⁶ Laboratory of Immunopathology, Department of Clinical Immunology and Allergy, Sechenov First Moscow State Medical University, Moscow, Russia.²³⁷ Montevideo, Uruguay.²³⁸ Department of Public Health & Primary Care, Leiden University Medical Center (LUMC), Leiden, The Netherlands.²³⁹ Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Erasmus MC, University Medical Center, Rotterdam, The Netherlands.²⁴⁰ Department

of Chest Medicine, Centre Hospitalier Universitaire UCL Namur, Université Catholique de Louvain, Yvoir, Belgium.²⁴¹ Pulmonary Unit, Department of Medical Specialties, Arcispedale S.Maria Nuova/IRCCS, AUSL di Reggio Emilia, Reggio Emilia, Italy.²⁴² Pulmonary Environmental Epidemiology Unit, CNR Institute of Clinical Physiology, Pisa, Italy.²⁴³ CNR Institute of Biomedicine and Molecular Immunology "A. Monroy", Palermo, Italy.²⁴⁴ Nova Southeastern University, Fort Lauderdale, FL, USA.²⁴⁵ Dept of Otorhinolaryngology, HNO-Klinik, Universitätsklinikum Düsseldorf, Düsseldorf, Germany.²⁴⁶ Department of Otolaryngology, Yong Loo Lin School of Medicine, National University of Singapore, Singapore, Singapore.²⁴⁷ Department of Medicine, Clinical Immunology and Allergy, McMaster University, Hamilton, ON, Canada.²⁴⁸ Centre for Clinical Research Sörmland, Uppsala University, Eskilstuna, Sweden.²⁴⁹ Eshelman School of Pharmacy, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC, USA.²⁵⁰ Cyprus International Institute for Environmental & Public Health in Association with Harvard School of Public Health, Cyprus University of Technology, Limassol, Cyprus.²⁵¹ Department of Pediatrics, Hospital "Archbishop Makarios III", Nicosia, Cyprus.²⁵² Department of Pulmonary Diseases, Celal Bayar University, Faculty of Medicine, Manisa, Turkey.²⁵³ The Allergy and Asthma Institute, Islamabad, Pakistan.²⁵⁴ Department of Paediatrics and Child Health, Red Cross Children's Hospital, Cape Town, South Africa.²⁵⁵ MRC Unit on Child & Adolescent Health, University of Cape Town, Cape Town, South Africa.²⁵⁶ Bull DSAS, Echirrolles, France.²⁵⁷ Universidad Católica de Córdoba, Córdoba, Argentina.²⁵⁸ Department of Otorhinolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery, Beijing Tongren Hospital and Beijing Institute of Otorhinolaryngology, Beijing, China.²⁵⁹ State Key Laboratory of Respiratory Diseases, Guangzhou Institute of Respiratory Disease, The First Affiliated Hospital of Guangzhou Medical University, Guangzhou, China.²⁶⁰ University Clinic of Respiratory and Allergic Diseases, Golnik, Slovenia.²⁶¹ National Hospital Organization, Tokyo National Hospital, Tokyo, Japan.

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